

- New York Members Call for Swift Action on Agricultural Disaster

Declaration -

Washington, DC – Congressmen John Hall (NY-19), Maurice Hinchey (NY-22), Michael A. Arcuri (NY-24) and Congresswoman Kirsten Gillibrand (NY-20) joined together today to call on the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to expedite any request from the State of New York for an agricultural disaster declaration.

Intense winds, rainfall, and serious floods due to the recent northeaster have led to road closings, evacuations, and as of yet untold amounts of damage to New York's communities.

"These conditions may pose a significant challenge to farmers in the Hudson Valley and elsewhere in the state due to soil damage and limitations on field access due to flooding. The storm also threatens to exacerbate delays in planting that local farmers have already experienced due to unseasonably low temperatures," the legislators wrote in a joint letter sent today to Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns.

"The flooding brought on by this devastating storm has affected farms throughout the Hudson Valley," said Hall. "New York's farmers have already been hurt by an exceptionally long winter this year. The damage from this storm could make bad conditions worse for these farms that are essential to New York's economy and quality of life. My colleagues and I in Congress are working to ensure that Hudson Valley farmers receive swift action on any federal assistance they need to recover quickly and begin to rebuild their livelihoods."

"Our farmers, who play critical roles in our communities and economy, need all of the assistance they can get to recover from this devastating storm," Hinchey said, "While we await a possible request from Governor Spitzer for a federal agricultural disaster declaration, those of us in Congress want to make sure that such a declaration is issued quickly if it is in fact needed. The quicker our farmers receive assistance the better off they and all New Yorkers will be."

"The hard-working farmers of Upstate New York have been hit hard by the recent floods and unseasonable weather - affecting our economy and placing family businesses in jeopardy," said Arcuri, a member of the House Wine and Organic Caucuses. "My colleagues from Upstate and I are taking the necessary steps to ensure that local farmers, from vineyards to dairies to hay, can count on help when they need it. Agriculture remains the number one industry in New York State - employing twelve percent of the workforce and generating over \$3.6 billion in economic activity each year. I'm working with local farmers to ensure that we continue to grow this critical industry, and I'll do my part by ensuring the investments, infrastructure, and policies necessary to maintain our agricultural economy."

"The recent northeaster has posed problems for citizens throughout my district, but none more than farmers, whose livelihood depends on being able to plant their crops with enough time to harvest before winter returns," said Congresswoman Gillibrand. "The fruit and vegetable farmers that are the lifeblood of our rural communities are still hoping against hope that this storm will not bring as much damage as expected, but I believe it is imperative for the USDA to be standing at the ready with disaster assistance if the worst scenario comes true. Without

assistance, I know that many of our farmers will not be able to survive another season."

-30-